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GREEK IDEAS OF AN AFTERWORLD.

A STUDY OF THE RELATION BETWEEN PRACTICE AND BELIEF.

WE have a free and easy way of generalizing the after-world of Greek religious belief as an underworld. This is indeed the usual form of the belief from Hesiod onward, and it is the view generally disclosed by Homer both in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Yet the fact is that the most deliberate and detailed Greek presentation of the approach to that dread world, that of the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, does not at all represent it as an underworld like the infernal regions of Vergil's fancy, but as a far western realm. The far-wandering Odysseus sails to the distant west, out of the sea, and across the mighty ocean stream to its farther shore; he beaches his black-hulled ship on a lone waste beach where stand the barren groves of Persephone; thence he directs his steps inland to a great white rock at the confluence of the Styx, Pyriphlegethon and Acheron; and there it is that he enters the purlieu of the many-peopled house of dark-browed Hades.

The Odyssean realm of the dead is reached neither by descent into a cave nor by passage underneath an overhanging ledge. It is of the same level as the land of living men. Its darkness is apparently due to its location beyond the path of the western sun, which, descending into Ocean Stream, disappears somewhere from the sight of mortal men to be ushered in anew by rosy-fingered Eos, each succeeding morn. To speak of Odysseus as descending into an underworld is to have but little regard for the language of Homer. Clearly to discern the picture that he actually

presents is to become aware of a striking contrast between it and the afterworld of classic Greek and Roman belief; and this contrast raises the problem of explaining and accounting for such different views, obviously related in the same way to the same fact,—the fact of death. An obvious relation, I say; if this appears to be but a bold assumption, I trust it will be justified in the course of my argument.

A study of early man's beliefs about an afterworld involves a consideration of two groups or series of facts—mental facts and motor facts, or facts of belief and facts of practice,—both associated with the event of death. Apparently these two kinds of facts do not simply constitute two parallel series that were mutually unrelated in life and thought and that may therefore be studied and understood apart from each other; they seem to have an intimate and genetic relationship. This, however, is not to say that they are absolutely simultaneous in origin, or that one may not be primary and the other secondary, both in origin and importance. On the contrary, in their genesis, either belief is antecedent and causal to practice, or practice is antecedent and causal to belief.

It is popularly supposed that belief originates and dictates practice, or custom, which is thus regarded as secondary to belief. Anthropologists generally confirm the supposition, and whole systems of social interpretation and philosophy have been built upon the assumption. Professor Seymour, in his *Greek Life in the Homeric Age*, insists upon this relation in the case of Greek mortuary practice and belief, and cautions the reader against assuming that the Greeks who maintained certain customs may have "inherited also the beliefs on which those customs were originally based." He brings to bear upon the case the authority of the German scholar Rohde, declaring that "Rohde gives as the *cause* of the adoption of cremation by the ancestors of the Homeric Greeks, a desire to rid themselves

of the souls of the dead; and as a *result* of the change, the abandonment of the old ritual and sacrifices."

According to Professor Brinton, "The funeral or mortuary ceremonies, which are often so elaborate and so punctiliously performed in savage tribes, have a twofold purpose. They are equally for the benefit of the individual and for that of the community. If they are neglected or inadequately conducted, the restless spirit of the departed cannot reach the realm of joyous peace, and therefore returns to lurk about his former home and to plague the survivors for their carelessness.

"It was therefore to lay the ghost, to avoid the anger of the disembodied spirit, that the living instituted and performed the burial ceremonies; while it became to the interest of the individual to provide for it that those rites should be carried out which would conduct his own soul to the abode of the blest."

Here again practice is regarded as secondary to belief, and is interpreted by reference to belief. Professor Frazer, also, the dean of living anthropologists, insists upon this relation between our two series of facts, and cannot admit or conceive of the opposite as being true. I intend, however, to take the other side of the question here involved, advancing the proposition that it was mortuary practice that constituted the motive for belief in an afterworld; and especially shall I endeavor to indicate the application of this formula to the genetic interpretation of Greek ideas of an afterworld.

The Hellenic peoples of whom we have knowledge universally believed in an afterworld, whither the souls of mortals departed at death and where they had a continued existence. But they entertained not merely the two conflicting beliefs already mentioned; they held in developed form at least four quite different beliefs regarding the destination and abode of the souls of the dead. According

to one of these beliefs the souls of dead men ascended to Olympus, as did that of Heracles in story; according to another they descended into an underworld; in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* Homer places them in a continental region beyond the western verge of Ocean Stream; and Pindar places the souls of great heroes in "Islands of the Blest" in the far Western Ocean.

It may be well at this point to note some apparently fundamental resemblances between these last two beliefs. Pindar places the souls of sinful mortals in an underworld, subject to sentences reluctantly imposed upon them. Hesiod declares that the men of the Golden, Silver and Bronze ages were hidden away in earth; and it is but natural, because of the different types of life imputed to them, that he should fancy different conditions for them after death. But the souls of his age of heroes, he says, were given a life and an abode apart from men, and established at the ends of the earth in "Islands of the Blest by deep-eddying Ocean." He does not state the direction of these wondrous islands, but undoubtedly their direction, like that of the Pindaric Islands of the Blest and that of the *Odyssean* realm, was already so fixed in the tradition of his day that there was no need of indicating it. It would appear, then, that in essential characteristics the continental *Odyssean* realm and the Islands of the Blest are alike in being conceived as western, and differ only in geographical form and extent. From this it would further appear that the notions of these two similar abodes of the dead are variants derived from a single source. But if these two notions did grow out of a single origin there was certainly a reason for the divergence, which it should be part of our task to discover. And yet, on the other hand, it may be unnecessary or even incorrect to assign their origin to the same people, even though we may feel compelled to assume

that the significant common element of direction must inhere in a common element of antecedent cause.

Whence came these three or four differing beliefs? That is to say, upon what difference of psychological ground do they severally stand? No one man could at one time entertain so many and so contradictory beliefs upon one subject; neither could one homogeneous people, as, for example, a single city state of the Mycenean civilization, or even the Minoan civilization of Crete as a whole. Wherefore we should probably look for this difference of belief either in the several racial stocks amalgamated to form the historic Greek people, or in part to their respective traditional beliefs and in part to alien streams of influence. But in either case it will be pertinent to inquire how different races and racial stocks should have come thus to act and believe so differently in the face of the same fact, death. To trace a belief or practice from one people back to another should never be taken as an explanation; this done, the question of real origin and motive still remains, as insistent as ever. Neither should identity of belief or practice be taken as necessary evidence of racial relationships, or of racial contacts; nor difference of belief or practice as evidence of difference of race. There are others besides the human factor that enter into the origin and development of practice, as we shall presently see.

With regard to mortuary practice, the Greek world furnishes only two types of historically attested facts. The Homeric Achæans cremated their dead, and the practice survived far beyond the Homeric, and even the Periclean age. The Mycenean civilization laid its dead beneath the surface of the earth, and this practice gradually superseded cremation, even among the descendants of the Achæans. Thus the Greeks of historical times had two strongly contrasted modes of disposing of their dead, corresponding to two of the contrasted beliefs we have mentioned. For there

is undoubtedly a genetic relation between cremation and belief in a heavenly abode of souls, and between inhumation and belief in an underworld. But which is cause and which effect? And how did the causal series itself originate? And how could the belief in a western abode of souls be related to either of these, either as antecedent or as consequent?

These two series of facts in Hellenic life give rise to three problems of immediate significance; to say nothing of others more remote, as for example, how man came to believe that he had a soul at all, how nearly the belief coincides with actuality, the origin of religious fears, etc. The three special problems thus isolated for present consideration are:

1. What is the genetic relation and order of precedence between practice and belief,—between cremation and belief in a heavenly abode of souls, and between inhumation and belief in an underworld?

2. In case either belief or practice is found to be antecedent to the other, how then did this antecedent series take its rise?

3. Whence and how came the belief in a far western abode of souls, and why the apparently twofold differentiation of this belief, which we have noted?

In the interest of brevity I may appear to be cutting the Gordian knot rather than untying it; but I feel sure that the drift of my argument will be caught, and that its essential truth must make a strong appeal for assent.

In the first place, let us consider this intimate and inherent correspondence between mortuary practice and belief about the dead, under conditions where we can see more plainly the part played by geographical environment, and where at the same time we can be sure of the soil on which our two series of facts originated; for we know not yet where the practice of inhumation originated among the

Myceneans and Minoans, nor where cremation first developed among the Achæans.

The ancient Egyptians and the Incas of Peru preserved their dead by mummification, and both believed in a bodily resurrection of the dead. We are reasonably sure that the land where each of these peoples developed was likewise the soil upon which their respective traditions in this matter originated; we shall be still more sure of this local origin as we proceed. Did the belief or the practice precede?

Now no matter what we may imagine them to have thought about soul and body and their mutual relations before the practice began, the Egyptians and Peruvians could not have cremated their dead; both Egypt and Peru lacked that abundant supply of fuel which would be necessary for this practice among a numerous people. Neither could either people long have inhumed its dead in the fertile valley land of its abode. These restricted valleys early became the seat of such dense populations that productive land could not be permanently set aside for burial purposes; nor could land under cultivation be wantonly trampled over for this common social purpose, even though six feet of earth were sufficient for the individual grave. Of necessity, therefore, the adjacent desert ridges were employed for the purpose, and the earliest mode of burial there was inhumation. But the dry climate and the nitrous character of the upland soil, both in Egypt and Peru, tended naturally to preserve the bodies of the dead. The action of wind and wild animals, however, tended often to exhume them, at the same time disclosing a high degree of preservation. In order to protect their dead, especially to prevent the work of their hands from being made of none effect, the Egyptians, in particular, came to build rock tombs. But this required much labor and expense. Yet it was cheaper to build one tomb large enough for many burials,

for whole families, even through successive generations, than to build many individual tombs. Hence, by mutual suggestion and social rivalry through long stretches of time, the mighty Pyramids of Egypt came to be developed.

But under these conditions a tomb must be entered from time to time for new burials; and in spite of their high degree of preservation by natural means, the bodies of the dead within gave rise to noisome odors. Hence arose the practice of embalming with aromatic spices, to counteract or obscure the evil odors of decomposition. What but this fact of unpleasant odors could first have suggested the use of expensive spices in embalming? With the prominent Egyptian nose was undoubtedly associated a keen sense of smell. Wrappings of linen served in the first instance to retain the spices. The embalming tended to more perfect preservation of the flesh, and this result also helped to accomplish the primary object of the practice, which was the laying of unpleasant odors. Upon this combination of facts arose a profession of embalmers, who developed a more and more elaborate technique. When death and funerals had thus become an economic burden upon the living, for which no obvious or adequate return was received, the question of meaning inevitably arose and persistently pressed for a satisfactory answer. It is exceedingly difficult for man to admit that he is spending sacred energies in vain or purposeless quests, and thus making a fool of himself; and so the practice, entailing so large an expense, insistently required a sanction, and a tremendous one at that.

Now the care lavished upon the dead body, by tending to preserve it for an indefinite length of time, embodied within it an inherent and obvious suggestion of the primary sanction that actually came to be formulated. For by this time embalming had come to take place before the process of decomposition had set in; and the original cause of the practice was no longer making its appearance, even though

from allied experience the agents may well have been aware of what would soon happen without embalming and burial. So now, instead of really knowing that they are trying to forestall or allay the noisome odors of decomposition, they detect but one purpose in the practice, the preservation of the body. But why should the body of the dead be preserved? With this query arose the first suggestion of a mystical or transcendental idea in association with the practice, and the first attempt to formulate an ultra-pragmatic or other-world sanction for it. This sanction was formulated as an explanation. It was from the first employed for this purpose, and as all thinking individuals were implicated in the practice no one was in a position to question or challenge it.

It might be urged on this latter ground that the question of purpose or value could never have arisen; but we must not overlook the fact of foreign contacts—especially among the Egyptians—wherein contrasted practices would raise the question from without, if not from within. Besides this, they had always the poor with them, who, from contrast with their own meager efforts in the same field, would be forced to think about values. And above all, there was always growing up among them the supreme pragmatist,—the eager, curious child.

Thus this question of values, like the ghost of Banquo, was ever likely to confront the living, and only a powerful sanction would serve to lay it. The priesthood and the professional embalmers, in particular, had constant need of the sanction, as a means of justifying their existence. Thus it is that this sanction arose, and that it has been passed on and received as an explanation even by the wisest, even unto the present day. And that is in brief the story of the Egyptian and Peruvian practice of mummification, and of their belief in a bodily resurrection. It all comes back in the last analysis to the fact of decomposition

and the despised sense of smell, which would move men to acts of aversion and riddance.

But, one may ask, is it not after all just possible that this practice arose out of an antecedent idea of souls and the notion that the body must be preserved against a future resurrection and a reincarnation of the soul? Rather is it not far more reasonable to see that the belief arose out of the practice, as a sanction for the care and expense involved in it? On the first alternative we must certainly congratulate the Egyptians, and the Peruvians too, on having found a geographical location so congenial to their belief. What would they have practiced, or how could this belief have survived, had they lived in the valley of the Congo or Amazon, or even in Greece? Or how could they have come to believe in a heavenly abode of souls, when they did not cremate? And if the belief in a bodily resurrection came before the practice of mummification, then how did this notion and belief arise?

Now let us take a look at barren, hungry, frost-bitten Tibet. What burial practices and what cognate beliefs about the dead have from the first been inherent in the natural environment of man presented by the Himalayan highland? Let us picture to ourselves a people making here its arduous ascent from lowest savagery to barbarism. As they come to have a settled place of abode, how shall they secure for themselves riddance from the discomforting odors of decomposition that follow in the train of death? Suppose that they have attained to such a degree of economic efficiency as to have left behind the practice of cannibalism, and that they are as yet without any metaphysical or transcendental ideas and beliefs; how then shall they dispose of their dead? Or what shall they believe about their dead, if they have as yet paid no attention to them save by the simplest modes of seposition and abandonment?

Here in Tibet is a people that could not cremate its dead; for here, too, fuel is scarce. Neither could it inhumate its dead; for during a considerable portion of the year the deeply frozen ground is proof against even the tools of civilized man. Here preservation of the dead by natural means, that of freezing, may be assured for a season; but should this be relied upon temporarily, final burial by one means or another would become imperative with the advent of spring. Shall the Tibetans preserve the bodies of their dead through the long winter, to the end that they may give them some sort of approved burial in the spring? What could originally have suggested to them the notion of an approved form of burial, and of the preservation of their dead against the time when this should become possible? The primary function of burial by whatever means is avoidance or riddance of certain after effects of death; and with an abundance of carnivorous animal life scouring the country for the means of subsistence, how could the immediate, practical function of burial be more readily or more easily secured than by calling in the aid of dogs and vultures that infest the land? Now this is exactly what the Tibetans do, even to-day. And from their own hard struggle for existence they furthermore feel it an act of charity thus to minister to these scavengers of their land. There is no other people on earth with whom charity is so highly esteemed as a virtue, and so universally encouraged. Under the hard conditions of life, charity, generosity, is a necessary practice among their own kind. And furthermore, the leisure-class priesthood, which is very numerous, in its own self-interest has need of encouraging this fundamentally necessary virtue; and finally, this virtue is invoked as a sanction for the feeding of their dead to the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Without some notion of other ways of securing this same object, they could feel no need of this or of any other sanction.

In the case of a very few individuals of the highest rank cremation is allowed as a special honor, and naturally this privilege is mostly restricted to the religious hierarchy. It is evidently not the native Tibetan practice, but was plainly introduced into Tibet by the Buddhists of India, with whom it was native. But the great majority of the Tibetan dead go to feed the hungry dogs and vultures, which are highly esteemed for this purpose; and this, despite the fact that Tibet has for a dozen centuries been subjected to Buddhist influence, which would naturally favor cremation, its own native mode of burial, if this were economically possible. Here in Tibet the native mode of burial is directly apposite to geographical conditions, even as it was in Egypt and Peru; and the beliefs by which it is explained are merely so many sanctions, or justifications, which have been developed out of the practice itself.

But what are the Tibetan beliefs about the dead? When once they have acquired the notion of a soul that survives the event of death, whether originally or by adoption from other peoples, we should expect them to hold a belief in some sort of transmigration. From seeing the bodies of the dead devoured by animals, they would seem naturally to think that souls also passed into the bodies of these living sepulchers. This is exactly what they believe. We should furthermore expect them to have a preference for transmigration into the winged vulture that sails so easily through the air, to taking up their abode within the body of a lazy, grunting pig or snarling dog. Here too our surmises are correct. In the course of centuries, as the relation between practice and belief has become obscured, their beliefs have been elaborated and graduated, so that even non-carnivorous animals are included in certain cycles of transmigration. But in this fact of feeding their dead to animals is certainly to be found the original germ and suggestion of their belief in transmigration. Tibetan religious

ideas and beliefs are not so definitely conceived nor so systematically organized as are those of some other peoples, because their authors have never devoted so much personal care and energy to the disposal of their dead. They have not felt so strong a necessity for justifying their practice as have the Egyptians and some other peoples.

Again, let us consider the case of India, where Brahmanism and Buddhism have their origin and home. The Indians, like the Tibetans, hold a belief in transmigration, and of course for that same fundamental reason. That a mighty, far-scattered people like the Indians exhibits a characteristic belief or practice does not mean that all individuals of the group hold it in common. It would be too much to expect such a people, or any people at all, to be really homogeneous in belief and practice from the early stage when human burial began among their forebears until the present time. Thousands of families in India today are too poor to afford the most characteristic traditional form of burial for their dead, and throw them into rivers, or otherwise dispose of them. In Indo-China those too poor to afford cremation commonly carry out their dead to be eaten by the beasts of the jungle. On the Ganges, "When the pyre is built the nearest relative of the deceased goes to the temple and haggles with the keeper of the sacred fire over the price of a spark; and having paid what is required he brings the fire down in smouldering straw and lights the pile. If the family can afford to buy enough wood, the body is completely consumed; in any case the ashes or whatever is left on the exhaustion of the fire is thrown into the sacred river; . . . and any failure on the part of the fire to do its full duty is made good by the fish and the crocodiles."¹ Thus it is easy to see how in bygone days the Indian, at least in the lower social strata, became possessed of a belief in transmigration, and how, through

¹ Pratt, *India and its Faiths*. New York, 1915, p. 44.

ignorance of its primary source and relationships, carried it over into relationships bearing little or no connection with its parent practice, as in his abstinence from eating flesh.

And yet India, with its wide extent and countless population, has more constant elements of religious and philosophical belief than would at first seem possible,—a result of mutual contacts and social cooperation through long stretches of time. “The central point of Hindu thought is the soul. It is from the soul or self that all the reasoning of the Hindu starts and to it that all his arguments finally return.”² Probably the most widely known characteristic of Indian religious philosophy is the doctrine of the immanence and absoluteness of the supreme soul Brahman, with its correlate doctrine of the oneness of the individual self with the All,—the merging of the objective, phenomenal world into the universal absolute, which is Brahman. Yet it is plain that this interest in the objective world begins with the individual human self. “This unity of the soul with God is at the foundation not only of Hindu metaphysics, but of Hindu ethics as well. The great aim of life is the full realization of that God-consciousness, the significance of which forms the central point of Hindu thought. Before this can be fully attained, the soul must be liberated from the mass of particular interest and petty wishes and self-born illusions which weigh it down and hide from it the beatific vision. Hence *liberation* and *realization* may be called the twin ideals of Hinduism, and it is these that determine all its ethical theory.”³

The doctrine of “liberation” and “realization,” the doctrine of Nirvana, the yoga-systems, and other characteristic Indian notions would be meaningless and impossible without the basic body of “religious intuitions” that make

² Pratt, p. 91.

³ Pratt, p. 92.

up the Brahmanistic doctrine of the Upanishads. But an "intuition" has in primordial genesis some sensuous basis, direct or indirect; and so, instead of seeking for the idea or philosophy back of the practices associated with these and other beliefs, we should undoubtedly seek in practice for the sensuous elements of suggestion that formed the basis of the beliefs, and then seek in turn for the sensuous motive of the practice itself.

We may admit that the Indians are a peculiar people; yet, when we pin ourselves down to minute details, we note that the testimony of their senses, the ultimate constituent of all intellectual forms, is the same as our own. Their intellectual peculiarity consists not in their physical or psychological selves, but in the differences of their objective environment, part of which they themselves make, and in the various ways in which the sensuous details of experience with it have been combined through generations of spontaneous social collaboration.

If, then, we consider these doctrines of the "infinite ocean of the absolute Brahman"; of the essential oneness of the one with the All; of the soul's struggle for liberation to realize and complete this oneness in "Nirvana, or re-absorption into the eternal light": as we contemplate these doctrines, seeking to discover their source in sensuous experience at a time antedating the rise of science with its theories of atoms and corpuscles, can we not almost see before our eyes the primitive populace of India cremating its dead and beholding the body ascending in the form of flame and smoke, thus becoming absorbed in the ocean of air, which to them, at that time, seems infinite?

We examine Indian burial practices, both present and past, and we find that from time immemorial cremation has been a characteristic Indian mode of burial. When men actually beheld the body of a deceased friend dissolve and mingle with the elements, they were bound to have

different thoughts about the destiny of the individual than if it were laid away in earth to decompose by degrees for an unknown length of time, or if it were altogether preserved by embalming against decomposition. And from seeing the individual thus pass so visibly from a corporate existence into thin air, they would also be moved more strongly to contemplate the other end of individual existence, the whence as well as the whither. There could be no doubt that the deceased had attained to freedom from the bonds and ills of terrestrial existence; and the living, from their own desires to live beyond the usual limits of life, would be brought face to face with the question whether they should ever live again and how their scattered selves could realize another conscious existence. To hold before them the notion of another life as something to be desired was to believe in it; and from this point it was an easy matter to identify the conditions of existence before birth and after death, whence Brahman becomes the source, the end, and the essential constituent of individual existence.

Add to all this the practice of feeding to animals either the entire body or the remains of partial cremation, already noted—the differences of practice being characteristically in agreement with differences of social rank—and we have the proper sensuous background in practice for the doctrine of transmigration, which we find embodied in the doctrine of Karma and fused with the doctrine of Nirvana.

Geographical conditions undoubtedly favored cremation in India in the days when fuel was abundant and easily secured. But with a numerous population making large demands upon the wood-supply through scores of generations, the practice has become more and more expensive, and the demand for sufficient sanction has become more imperative. Thus in the course of many centuries the beliefs genetically inhering in these practices have become much elaborated; and, by the development of an elab-

orate logic and metaphysic, they have in turn modified the practice itself. It is in this way that the religious institution has justified its ways and made itself indispensable to men.

Here again we may claim without fear of successful contradiction that burial practice arose as a purely practical matter and by its form dictated the form that belief about souls must take, when once the notion of soul itself arose out of the practice. The sense of smell together with the simple, practical knowledge of the purifying agency of fire suggested and motivated the practice; here it is that we find the sensuous motive behind the practice, which in turn motivated the belief. Primarily, the belief is a supposed explanation of the practice, invented when the practice had become so highly elaborated as to conceal its real cause and thus to demand justification. Men do not feel the need of explaining or justifying the obviously practical.

But the explanation given of this and other kinds of practice is not an explanation of the covert act; rather is it intended to explain or justify the care and energy devoted to it or required by it in the name of social form. The overt act merely affords suggestions toward the explanation that is evolved. It is only after a long lapse of time during which a practice has by social concurrence become highly elaborated that a justification is required. Men acting in unison, with a common sense or emotional interest, will do extravagant things not dreamed of in individual life. But, having participated in such an act, unsophisticated man can easily find a justification for his act, suggested by the act itself. It seems to be a characteristic of universal human nature, in the absence of a true, antecedent cause for specified conduct, to seek about for some consequent justification; and the race seems equally prone

to accept such a justification as a statement of antecedent cause.

And now we may return to the case of Greece. We do not find there that close, almost necessary relation between practice and environment which we have seen in Tibet, Egypt and Peru; in fact, we cannot say with certainty where the two historic Greek forms of burial originated. Already some 3000 years before the Christian era we find the Minoan civilization in the Ægean world, practicing inhumation. And the northern Achæans, from whatever source they came, were already at their arrival in Greece practicing cremation. As to the relation between the beliefs and practices that prevailed on Hellenic soil, we can argue only by analogy, or homology, with what we have seen to be true in Egypt, Peru, Tibet and India; but it is far more reasonable to believe that the same relation holds true here than to defend the other horn of the dilemma.

With regard to the Achæan belief in a heavenly abode of souls, we may cut the matter short by asserting its rise out of the practice of cremation. In the course of time, after this practice had become the rule among the ancestors of the Homeric Achæans, they probably came to feel much the same regarding it as did the Indian of California. "It is the one passion of his superstition to think of the soul of his departed friend as set free, and purified by the flames; not bound to the mouldering body, but borne up on the soft clouds of smoke toward the beautiful sun."⁴ I say the Achæan may have come to feel in this way, much as did the Hindu; but this was not the original motive of his practice. His thoughts about the mouldering body of his departed friend and his fancies about purification were not in the first instance inspired by a desire for the friend's welfare after death; he was first of all concerned for the

⁴ Powers, *The Indians of California*, pp. 181, 207.

living, especially with regard to the sense of smell. And however transcendental the notion of purification came to be by reinterpretation of the practice, after its original motive had ceased to prevail—because burial came to be practiced before decomposition had set in—the very association of purity with cremation betrays the original motive of the practice, just as did the use of spices by the Egyptians.

As with cremation among the Achæans, so in the case of inhumation among the Minoans and Mycenæans we may assert that the practice was suggested, and passed through its primary stage of development, as a means of escape from the discomforting odors of decomposition. And as the belief in an upper-world abode of souls developed as an explanation and sanction for cremation, so belief in an underworld developed by suggestion from the practice of inhumation. To make good the claim that belief came first and suggested practice, one must show satisfactorily how any people ever could have associated souls with a heavenly or with an underworld abode without the practice of cremation or inhumation, respectively, or at least contact with some people who did practice this mode of burial.

The belief associated with cremation never became so highly elaborated in Greece as it did in India, and for very good reasons. For in the first place, Greece never came so completely into the power of a priestly class as did India; and in the second place, the practice on which it depended here came into rivalry with the already established practice of inhumation, which on the whole was cheaper. To this we should add the fact that the social institutions of the older race proved to be the more persistent, as with the Normans and Saxons in England, whence this must have been especially true of such ideas as we are discussing. And however spectacular and interesting the act of crema-

tion became among the Hellenes, as reflected in the Homeric picture of the funerals of Patroclus and Hector, the accompanying conception of the soul after death could be but very vaguely imaged, as in the case of India; while the same idea accompanying burial in the ground, in cave-tombs, cist-tombs, and rock-tombs, as the so-called "treasury of Atreus" was capable of very definite imagery. Thus, although cremation continued to be practiced side by side with inhumation, it was the belief associated with the latter practice that possessed the more definite imaginative appeal, and that finally prevailed.

Yet the upper-world conception of the soul persisted and influenced the belief of later generations. As in the first instance it was only the Achæan masters of Hellas who practiced cremation, while the subject populace inhumed its dead; and since in the classical age it was only the wealthy who could afford cremation; so it came to be believed that the "good"—the worthy and the proud—at death went to heaven above, while the poor in purse and spirit descended into hell. Various modifications of this composite belief have grown up by internal suggestion and by accretions from foreign practices and beliefs; but in the last analysis each belief grew out of a practice, and the practice originated as an obvious and immediately practical necessity.

While we cannot say just where or why the Minoans developed inhumation and the Achæans cremation, or why some other practice did not arise and prevail among each people, yet it is perhaps significant that cremation was the practice of the northern race, like the aboriginal Hindus, —a people who had more need of fire on a large scale, such as would be necessary for the cremation of human bodies, a people with whom fire was necessarily a more continuous object of experience and therefore a more constant agent

of purification in other ways also, than it was in the sunny southland of Crete and Hellas.

Homer was the poet of the Achæan overlords of Hellas. Yet he was apparently not of the Achæan race. Although he quite consistently presents to us the Achæan mode of burial, his idea of the soul and its abode is not consistent with the practice of cremation. He thinks of the cremated Heracles as having a corporate existence in Olympus, with lovely-ankled Hebe at his side; yet Heracles must also be seen of Odysseus in the house of Hades. Homer is himself aware of the contradiction, and declares it to be but a phantom that Odysseus sees there. On the other hand, Achæan heroes—Patroclus and others such as would naturally have been cremated—he unequivocally represents as being in the populous realm of Hades in the distant west. In Homer's references to the realm of the dead we discern the unconscious and inextricable mingling of at least three traditional views on the subject. Nor should we be surprised at this when we note that the entire period from the Trojan War to the final completion of the Homeric tales was one of ethnic amalgamation between at least the two races we have already mentioned. Our view of this process is still further complicated, and yet perhaps much illuminated, by the knowledge of a continuous intercourse with the west coast of Asia Minor during this time, such that most of the cities that laid claim to Homer were of this region.

And this prompts us to consider how the notion could have arisen that the dread abode of souls was in the west. It would perhaps be interesting to point to the west as the region of the setting sun, to associate it with the death of the day, and to conjure up some fancied analogy as having been indulged in by the aboriginal authors of this tradition. Yet in the face of such a procedure stands the fact that the west has always been the land of allurements and promise

to which Greek no less than Teuton has ever turned his eyes. The fact is that if the association of the west is an essential element of the belief, as it appears to be, then thoughts of the west were inherently involved in the form of burial with which the belief was genetically associated.

We might look to cremation for the source of the association, if anywhere in the Ægean world the prevailing winds blew to the westward, thus bearing the smoke of the funeral pyre in that direction. But such is not the case; and besides, neither the earthly location of the Odyssean afterworld and the Islands of the Blest, nor the substantial, corporeal nature of the spirits dwelling there would permit of this conclusion.

I know not what may be the value of the suggestion I am about to make upon this subject; I simply present it as the most plausible explanation I can imagine for the conception of a western realm of the dead. I have by no means enumerated all the methods that man has employed for the disposal of his dead. Fundamentally there is but one reason for disposing of the dead by any means, and that is to secure a separation between the dead and the living. Inhumation and cremation are merely the most obvious and most universally practicable means of securing this one end.

Now one of the simplest modes of accomplishing this object, where natural facilities permit, is what is called canoe-burial,—a mode in which the body of the dead is placed upon a log, or raft, or boat, and set adrift upon the sea, or down a stream. In the course of time this practice, just as any other, is subject to elaboration and refinement, and finally to mythical, transcendental interpretation. I suggest that this Hellenic notion of a western realm of the dead originated on the western coast of Asia Minor. Here all rivers flow to the west; out to the westward over the sea are beautiful islands which could once have been imag-

ined as the destination of bodies set adrift on the rivers of this coast; and finally, when these islands had been visited and explored and the fancy exploded, it was but natural to set the place of destination of the dead still farther to the west beyond the Ægean archipelago. And since even by Homer's time the Hellenes had dim fancies, more or less substantiated, of extensive coasts in the distant west, it was but natural that the earlier notion of an island abode for the dead had to give way to fancies of a more continental region. But as the primitive occupants of this Asiatic coast had grown bolder and put out to sea, they had perhaps found on the coasts of the Ægean islands the unsightly wrecks of their death-craft, and so had come to discontinue the practice. It is not necessary to suppose that this practice was current in the time of Homer, or even of the Trojan War; mythical fancies may survive long after the conditions that fathered them have ceased to exist.

Such is my suggestion for explaining the notion of a western abode of souls, presented on the assumption that both these traditions go back to a single local source. Yet I am not unmindful that the coast of Epirus and Illyria furnish the natural conditions in which either one or both may have arisen; whence we should have to suppose that they were brought into Greece by the Achæans. On this assumption we should have to suppose further that these Achæan adventurers, after leaving their native abode and the conditions supporting their native mortuary practice, took to cremation as a new means of disposing of their dead, and yet retained the tradition associated with the native practice of canoe burial. This would help to account for the incongruities in the Homeric conception of the condition of souls whose bodies had been burned; it would mean that they had not yet maintained the practice long enough to have invested it with a systematic sanction and

philosophy. As between these two suggestions, I should probably prefer the former. As yet I see no way in which archeology may help us here.

In any case the tradition of a western abode of the dead, which had already been started and which had by this time lost all direct association with the practice, continued and gathered to itself the Homeric, and Hesiodic, and Pindaric refinements and differentiæ which we have already noted. Such is the regular course of tradition. It is undoubtedly in this way, and by reference to the same kind of burial practice in Britain that the traditional picture came to be built up of the black-hulled ship that bore "Elaine the fair, Elaine the beautiful" down the Thames to Westminster; and of that other dusky barge that bore out into the mystic lake beyond the ken of mortal man all that was mortal of good King Arthur. Such a social background is probably necessary for the historical interpretation of the death voyage of Sinfiotli, son of Sigmund, away "to the west"; and of Balder and his faithful wife Nanna, laid on their funeral pyre on the deck of the stately ship Ringhorn. We can understand and explain how a traditional practice arises and grows by social concurrence, and how a belief arises in association with it, all conscious association with the practice being gradually lost. But to explain how practice should arise out of an antecedent belief, and how that belief should first have arisen as a purely intellectual conception without sensuous motivation—as the grin without the cat, as one might say—in spite of some three thousand years of effort upon this problem, we are quite as far from a satisfactory solution as ever.

To conclude, then, the act of burial by early peoples is an act of aversion and riddance, even as the traditional interpreters of the act have claimed; but the primary object of the riddance, instead of being a metaphysical, or spiritual object, is a real, concrete, sensuous reality, which is

exactly the necessary and apposite kind of motive that we should expect. If only Hobbes had hit upon this formula! But he had not at hand the rich accumulation of anthropological data that we now possess. And even Spencer and Tylor, with all the data at their command and with all their ability to analyze and organize their essential elements, made the same mistake as Hobbes. For in the first place they made belief about the dead a result of secondary sensuous experience, instead of primary; and secondly, they made it to depend upon visual instead of olfactory experience. The sense primarily concerned in the evolution of religious aversions associated with ideas of the dead is undoubtedly that of smell. This primary aversion, by a traditional transfiguration, becomes a dread or fear of the dead and places of burial; and only when man requests of his most-used sense to show him the cause of the aversion does it become visualized. And then only is it that dreams, visions, apparitions, reflections and other illusory visual phenomena gain a superstitious meaning.

Thus it is only by misinterpretation of the act of avoiding or allaying the noisome odors of decomposition, when the real motive to the act has disappeared from view, that a people can ever explain its burial practice as a spiritual "riddance" or "aversion," or as a "laying of the ghost." For the anthropologist to accept this secondary aspect of the relation between belief and practice as being primary, and to proceed upon this assumption to the explanation of burial practices is to put the cart before the horse. Such reasoning is all of a piece with myth; it is reasoning in a circle, and will never get us anywhere in the realm of scientific knowledge.

For such reasons as I have given above, which I believe to be sound, I feel reasonably certain that my primary assumption of an obvious and constant relation between the fact of death and beliefs about the dead is justified;

that geographical conditions have played a hitherto unrecognized part in the development of burial practice and belief about the dead; that the sense of smell has had an unrecognized share in the development of religious notions and especially religious fears; that the Greek notion of an underworld abode of the dead grew out of the practice of inhumation, and that the notion of a heavenly abode of souls in like manner grew out of the practice of cremation. And it is by reason of the satisfactory corroboration of my reasoning with regard to inhumation and cremation that I suggest a primitive practice of canoe-burial on the west coast of Asia Minor—or possibly the Balkan peninsula—as the primary motive to the conception of a western abode of souls, whether as Islands of the Blest or as a continental realm of dark-browed Hades.

ORLAND O. NORRIS.

YPSILANTI, MICHIGAN.